Older Adult Gambling Prevalence

Research shows that older adults tend to gamble to socialize on excursions, to change their routine, get away for the day and relieve feelings of boredom.1, 2, 3, 11

- Recreational gambling rates: Approximately 28.7% of U.S. adults over the age of 65 gamble recreationally (i.e., they gamble more than 5 times in a year).4
- Disordered gambling rates: Approximately 0.1–1.9% of older adults meet the criteria for disordered gambling.5

Recreational Gambling, Substance Abuse Problems and Mental Health Disorders

Among older adults, those who have a gambling disorder are significantly more likely than recreational and non-gamblers to also have mental health disorders and/or substance abuse problems.

Co-occurring Disorders Among Older Adults by Gambler Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance Abuse</th>
<th>Non-Gambler</th>
<th>Recreational Gambler</th>
<th>Gambling Disorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicotine Dependence</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Use Disorder</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Use Disorder</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health Disorders</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Mood Disorder</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personality Disorder</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (Pietrzak)
Problem/Disordered Gambling and Poor Health Outcomes

Among older adults, those who have experienced gambling problems are significantly more likely than their counterparts who have not experienced gambling problems to have mental disorders, substance abuse problems and/or poor health outcomes.

- Compared to older adults who do not gamble or gamble but are not problem/disordered gamblers, older adult problem/disordered gamblers are more likely to have the following poor health outcomes:
  - Obesity
  - Worse overall physical health

Gambling Pros and Cons

Research shows that older adults are at risk to develop problem gambling, but gambling can also be associated with positive outcomes for older adults. Some older adult gamblers report:

- Better social support (e.g., someone to talk to about problems)
- Lower levels of depression
- Higher self-rated health
- Higher cognitive functioning

Signs of a Gambling Disorder

A person shows signs of gambling disorder if he/she:

- Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve the desired excitement.
- Exhibits restless or irritable behavior when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
- Is preoccupied with thoughts about gambling.
- Gambles when feeling distress (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
- Chases one's losses/returns another day to get even.
- Lies to conceal the extent of gambling.
- Jeopardizes a significant relationship, job, or opportunity because of gambling.
- Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

For more information about gambling disorder, please refer to evaluation tools provided by the DSM-5.

Endnotes